

NEWS RELEASE

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PROGRAM HELPS STUDENTS SAY “YES” TO BUSINESS OWNERSHIP

*Black Belt Youth Seminar in its Fifth Year*

LIVINGSTON, AL--What do lip balm, cookies, and a teen magazine have in common? They're all successful businesses started by determined entrepreneurs. And these movers and shakers are ready to share their secrets with youth in West Alabama and Alabama's Black Belt counties.

The University of West Alabama's Small Business Development Center, in partnership with Governor Bentley's Black Belt Commission, will host the fifth annual Youth Entrepreneurial Success (YES) Summit on April 30 in Livingston. The event, which runs from 9 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. at Bell Conference Center, includes lunch is free to middle and high school students.

Donald Mills, director of UWA's Small Business Development Center and chairman of the Black Belt Commission's Small Business Development Committee, hopes this event will live up to previous year's successes. "We've always tried to book dynamic speakers who are living the dream of business ownership at an early age or who profoundly connect with young people," Mills says. In the past, speakers have included a teen real estate mogul, a teen fashion designer, and teen farmers. This year, the opening speaker will be Renee Sandler, Founder and CEO of Blamtastic, a lip balm company she started in Atlanta with her two young daughters.

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In 2014, Sandler was an Atlanta Business Person of the Year finalist and the Stevie Awards Consumer Goods Executive of the Year. Babble.com named the Sandlers one of “10 Most Impressive Families in America.” Robert Armstrong of Selma, CEO of G’Momma’s Cookies, turned his grandmother’s cookie recipes into a nationwide business. His products are sold nationwide in Cracker Barrel Country Stores, among other markets. Armstrong will be the keynote speaker at the luncheon.

Black Belt Commission Project Manager Ginger Stewart said this year’s event has been met with enthusiasm from sponsors in other parts of the country who serve the youth market. “Fashion Angels, a Milwaukee-based toy company, has generously sent some wonderful conference materials and door prizes, and when I spoke with the Memphis-based founder of *Justine* magazine about the event, she was so excited about what we were doing that she is sending a free copy of the magazine for every girl in attendance, along with an inspirational video for us to show during the program.”

Students will learn the basics of how to get an idea for a business, how to create a business plan, and how to market their goods and services. The program will also address “soft skills” including dining etiquette and business communication.

Mills said they expect just over 100 students at the event. Anyone interested in registering can contact Sheena Turner at The University of West Alabama’s Division of Outreach Services at 205-652-3665 or [srtturner@uwa.edu](mailto:srtturner@uwa.edu).

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